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ABSTRACT

Teaching suggestions and questions on which to build a class discussion are presented regarding concrete poetry. An example of a poem about a bird's feather in which the words are arranged in the shape of a feather is included and is intended as a student handout. In addition to suggestions for student assignments, five sources of concrete poetry conclude this brief article. (JH)

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Handout of the Month

Creating and Understanding Concrete Poetry

Begin by writing on the chalkboard the following poem, in stanza form as shown below. Read it aloud or ask a student to do so. If you think your students might have difficulty with "sea of green" or with the word *hue,* clear up those two problems now.

In a sea of green, a patch of blue;
A color of such a brilliant hue,
That I stopped to wonder at the thing;
A feather lost by a bird on the wing.

Now, distribute copies of the poem as shown on the handout and as it was actually composed—in the shape of a feather—by Mary Waddel, a high school student. Here are some questions on which to build a discussion of her poem and of concrete poetry more generally.

1. Which version of the poem is more effective? Why? (You might want to keep in mind that a fairly convincing argument can be made in favor of the traditional stanza form!)
2. The poet seemed to make some definite choices about the size and shape of words and their placement on the page. Can you think of a reason why the word *wing* is placed as it is? The word *brilliant?* What meaning do you assign to the changes in size? Why is it appropriate to the meaning and the mood of the poem that the words after the last semicolon grow smaller and smaller?
3. If you were to add colors and a pictorial background to this poem, what colors and pictures would you use? Why?

If your students have not studied concrete poetry, explain that in such poetry the placement of the words on the page is related to their meaning in the poem. Ask them to create one-word concrete poems using the words *rainbow, dropout, waterfall, variety, crescendo,* and other words that lend themselves to such treatment. Emphasize that they can change the size and, to some extent, the shapes of letters and arrange the words on the page in unusual ways.

In a follow-up assignment ask students to write longer concrete poems similar to "The Feather" in which the meaning of the poem relates to its shape or to the inner arrangement of its words. Examples of concrete poetry are found in many anthologies. A useful collection appears on pages 722–27 in the second edition of *The Norton Introduction to Literature* edited by Carl E. Bain, Jerome Beaty, and J. Paul Hunter. It includes poems by e. e. cummings and George Herbert and Edwin Morgan's "The Computer's First Christmas Card." For more information about concrete poetry, you might check these: Milton Klonsky, *Speaking Pictures: A Gallery of Pictorial Poetry* (Crown, 1975); Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Indiana University Press, 1971); Marjorie Boulton, *The Anatomy of Poetry,* revised edition (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), especially pages 13, 204–8; and Charles Suhor, "How to Draw a Poem," *Louisiana English Journal,* Fall 1975.

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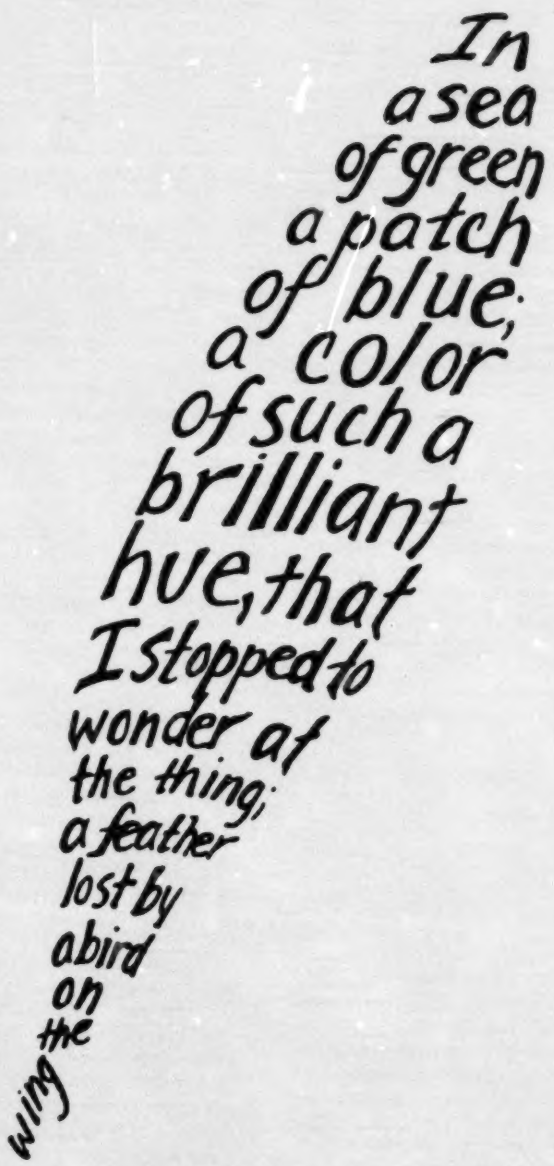
The Feather

Mary Waddel



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